

## Reducing Your Workload: B2B and B2C Integration

*How merging your B2B and B2C activities into one integrated system can save you time and money*

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Nobody likes to carry out more work than necessary. Most employers and employees have goals they would like to reach through their work preferring to spend as little time and money to effectively meet them. The mentality is that if a job can be completed efficiently then why waste extra manpower and resources on it? Doing so does nothing but cost your business time and money.

Even though the key to running a successful business is to use time and money effectively many companies involved in both B2B and B2C practices often choose to separate the two activities rather than integrate them, even though it essentially creates more work. Not only does this prove to be time consuming but it can also lead to problems in the long run.

Businesses that choose to keep their B2B and B2C practices separate are creating more work for themselves and their clients than necessary. Combining B2B and B2C web and system applications into one integrated system can be extremely beneficial for everyone. It allows everyone involved in the supply chain to complete their work efficiently and therefore focus energy on other imperative business matters. This article will discuss some of the reasons why utilising a single platform for both your B2B and B2C trade and retail activities can be of benefit to both you and your clients.

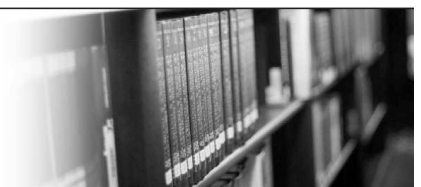
### **Integrated Stock Information**

Integrating the B2B and B2C systems within your fulfilment house into one system can save you many headaches. When two separate systems are run, one dealing with individual customers and the other with businesses, there is a lurking potential for confusion to occur. Stock information can often be updated on one system but not on the other. Your business may choose to run stock dry through your B2B system for instance, and minutes later you have customers trying to purchase goods from your consumer website where the stock information may be waiting its turn to be updated. This could leave you with some very unsatisfied customers as they will have believed their item to be in stock when in reality it's now on backorder.

Some companies with separate B2B and B2C platforms attempt to avoid such a disaster by keeping separate inventory for each of these platforms. For instance, they may delegate 1,000 pieces of one product to their B2B stock inventory and another 500 to their B2C. Although keeping the inventory separated avoids confusion between the two platforms by keeping stock levels up to date in each, it may actually prolong the receipt of goods for many of your customers. The 1,000 goods in your B2B stock for instance may run out but there may still be 400 left in your B2C stock. The B2C stock will then continue to sit in the warehouse just waiting to be ordered while the B2B stock is put on backorder.

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Rather than placing businesses on backorder you could have both platforms integrated and retrieve available stock from the same location. Amending your warehouse management system to integrate both B2B and B2C practices will inevitably work to everyone's advantage and leave customers ultimately satisfied.

With inventory coming out of the same virtual and physical location there is less cause for confusion and client frustration. Online stock information will not be dependent on a separate system ultimately ensuring that all stock information given to prospective clients is real time and accurate.

### ↘ **Maintaining One System (Versus Two)**

The maintenance of two platforms rather than one can also prove to be inefficient. Every system requires regular updates and revisions to keep it running to a certain standard. It is time consuming enough having to implement these changes for one system without having to replicate this.

There are many features of a B2B/B2C system that must be maintained in order for it to be productive. The following are a few examples:

- Company information, industry information and background
- Inventory/stock counts
- Product information
- Advertisements and promotions

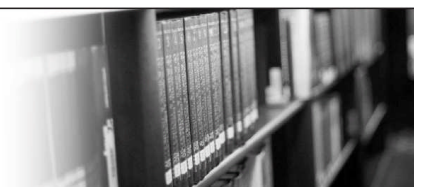
Maintaining separate B2B and B2C platforms would therefore not simply be a matter of duplicating data. It would require creating the most appropriate and captivating ways to draw in two distinct groups of prospective customers through the above examples. Maintaining one integrated system on the other hand would allow you to put all of your energy into one combined B2B/B2C system which would more than likely result in a more effective product.

### ↘ **Accounting and Invoices**

Customers shopping for themselves tend to pay for goods and services differently than businesses. Customers will pay for their goods immediately using cash, credit card or debit card, while businesses will generally be invoiced and not worry about paying for their goods until after receipt when an invoice and payment due date is assigned to them.

Much of the reason companies choose to keep their B2B and B2C platforms separate from one another is because of the differences in payment methods between these two client groups. They believe it is more sensible to keep a B2B relationship separate from a B2C one as combining the two would eventually cause accounting problems. Combining the two accounting systems however can be more efficient than people may think and ultimately work to save your finance department precious time.

Within the past two decades computers have significantly changed the way business is processed. Computer software has been developed and implemented into numerous business practices to simplify time consuming manual processes such as accounting. Accounting software can consolidate data from suppliers and customers into a neat and legible format, simplifying the book-keeping process for your finance department.



Electronic invoicing and various types of accounting software provide many benefits including prompt delivery of charges to client companies and likely faster receipt of payment to the billing company.

There should therefore be no reason for businesses *not* to combine their B2B and B2C activities due to reasons relating to accounting, as the improvements in communication technologies have improved billing and payment efficiencies in all respects.

### ➤ Centralised Marketing

Marketing your business to another business versus marketing to individual customers should involve different strategies. Both of these distinct groups of clientele have unique reasons for making purchases. It's essential for you to recognise and address these unique needs in order to generate the most effective marketing campaign for each.

### ➤ Emotion vs. Logic

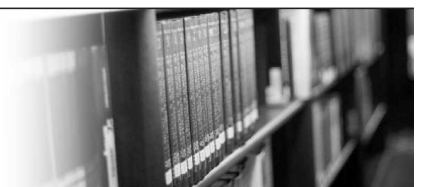
Individual customers tend to be product driven and focused on a shorter sales cycle. When searching for a product their decision tends to be based more on emotion than anything else. Such details as brand or price play an important emotional role in the customer's ultimate purchase decision.

A B2B trade on the other hand tends to be different than a purchase made by an individual customer. B2B transactions tend to be relationship based and have a lengthier sales cycle which may result in many purchases over an extended period of time. Businesses tend to make purchases in bulk on a relatively consistent basis. Their purchases tend to be focused on the value the goods or services could potentially bring to the company. They look for the most logical solution and tend to overlook preferences based on emotion.

Unique marketing strategies must therefore be created to target both businesses and individual consumers. Your B2B campaign must assure your business clients continued growth and profitability while your B2C campaign must address the feelings of satisfaction individual customers will receive once obtaining their order. Such campaigns can address these respective groups through various channels such as e-mail. Ultimately however you should draw all of your clientele to the same site where they will shop for goods based on their unique needs.

### ➤ Website Design

Although your business clients and individual customers possess unique needs and reasons for shopping as previously outlined, this does not necessarily mean that you have to create two separate websites to best satisfy each group. To most effectively market your business you can create separate campaigns for each of your respective clients (one for businesses and one for consumers) but have them utilise the same centralised website to help you reduce costs, labour and resources. Utilising the same website for both will bring all of your customers to one location where you can focus all of your marketing strategies.



The system can be developed in such a way to appeal to both businesses and customers. Some of the following techniques for instance could be implemented into your website:

- The typical shopping cart function should be incorporated allowing customers to shop through the site and add items to their cart once they find something they're interested in.
- An area or page within the site could be devoted to B2B trade, offering discounts and promotions on bulk items.
- An area or page within the site could be developed to assist both customers and businesses in their shopping decision (separate B2B FAQ and B2C FAQ, search tools, etc.).

As long as all of your marketing is centralised on the same website then all potential businesses or individual customers should be able to find the answers and deals they are searching for. If you were to focus all of your energy on one integrated website you could come up with various campaigns and promotions to appeal to both of your client bases leading them to the relevant areas designed for them within the site. With such centralised marketing there should be no cause for confusion amongst your customers.

It would also be wise to avoid creating duplicate sites (one for B2B and another for B2C) as websites with relatively similar data can be means for poor website ranking amongst search engines. Search engines disapprove of duplicated information. One website versus two however will invite all of your customers to one central location resulting in increased visits, improved search engine ranking, and the greatest potential for increased popularity.

#### In Conclusion

You can reduce your workload and increase overall business efficiency by integrating your B2B and B2C platforms. Rather than essentially duplicating your work you can put all of your effort into creating one integrated system that excels at inventory management, system maintenance, accounting and marketing.

Combining your B2B and B2C systems will ascertain that both your individual customers and business clients are constantly receiving updated stock information so they will not be caught by surprise if a product has been put on backorder. Maintenance will be reduced as you will only have to maintain one system as opposed to two. Accounting efforts will also be reduced as you will be dealing with one set of accounts as opposed to two.

Overall integrating your B2B and B2C systems centralises all of your retail and trade activity inevitably avoiding duplication of work and ensuring that all B2B and B2C relationships are maintained under one simplistic system.

